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Eradication of poverty and other development issues

Social development

Advancement of women

Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Promotion and protection of human rights

Letter date d 24 August 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

On 29 June 2010, the Government of Brazil, the Government of the Russian Federation, the World Bank and the World Food Programme held a forum, on the margins of the 2010 session of the Economic and Social Council, at United Nations Headquarters in New York entitled "Feed minds, change lives: school feeding, the Millennium Development Goals and girls' empowerment". I have the honour to enclose the summary report of the conclusions reached by the forum (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly.

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Annex to the letter dated 24 August 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Summary report of the 29 June 2010 forum on "Feed minds, change lives: school feeding, the Millennium Development Goals and girls' empowerment"

1. On the occasion of the 2010 session of the Economic and Social Council, a forum entitled "Feed minds, change lives: school feeding, the Millennium Development Goals and girls' empowerment" was co-sponsored by the Governments of Brazil and the Russian Federation, the World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP), as part of global advocacy efforts to foster greater awareness of the importance and value of school feeding. The forum provided a platform for the discussion of school feeding as an effective form of social protection for targeting hunger and undernutrition, an investment in long-term development and stability, an instrument in support of gender equality and a contribution towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

2. The Forum took the form of a two-hour panel discussion and presented an opportunity for the sharing of experiences by experts in the field and for the presentation of practical country examples by national authorities from various regions. Finally, the forum also provided an opportunity to highlight challenges and best practices, with the objective of re-energizing the dialogue on school feeding in preparation for the outcome document of the September 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, currently under negotiation.

3. The panel event was chaired by the Minister of State for Family and Population of Egypt, Moushira Mahmoud Khattab. The panel of experts included the following: Albaneide Peixinho, National School Feeding Coordinator-General, Ministry of Education of Brazil; Valdimir Chernikov, Deputy Director of the Department of Administrative Work and Exterior Relations of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation; Margaret Ndanyi, Head of School, Health and Nutrition at the Ministry of Education of Kenya; Evelyn Perard, Coordinator of the National School Feeding Programme of Haiti; Nancy Walters, Chief of School Feeding Policy, WFP; and Don Bundy, Lead Specialist on School Health, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS and Education at the World Bank. The event was facilitated by Phil Hay, Communications Adviser at the Human Development Network of the World Bank.

Panellist remarks

Egypt

4. The representative of Egypt said that investing in children was of utmost importance. Child poverty was different from adult poverty, which was important to consider when deciding how best to address the challenges of poverty. School feeding was not merely about delivering food to children to keep them healthy; it was about the inherent right of every child to life and survival and the right to be protected from child labour and child marriage, as enshrined in articles 6 and 27 of

the Convention on the Rights of the Child. School feeding was also instrumental to ensure the right to education and a decent standard of living.

Brazil

5. The representative of Brazil shared the Brazilian school feeding experience, which had become an integral part of Brazil's growth strategy and fight against hunger. The school feeding programme, which reached 47 million children, had become a wide success not only in Brazil but also as a model for many countries in the world. Today in Brazil, all students were legally entitled to a school meal. Food was used not only for nourishment but also as part of an educational process: the programme accompanied feeding with holistic education. The school feeding programme was intrinsically and legally linked with support to local agricultural production and the social rights of vulnerable groups. Brazil was partnering with WFP and had been actively engaged in South-South cooperation through the provision of technical support to school feeding programmes in countries in Africa and Latin America.

Russian Federation

6. The representative of the Russian Federation shared the experience of the Russian Federation with school feeding within the current market model of post-socialist economics. Today, under President Medvedev (who had revived the school feeding programme), the doctrine of food security led Russian efforts to provide fortified meals to schoolchildren. He emphasized that the private sector and civil society were important partners of the Government in managing the feeding programmes on-site. Children were 20 per cent of the population, but 100 per cent of the future.

Haiti

7. The representative of Haiti said that the national school feeding programme in Haiti had been ongoing before the recent earthquake in January and, despite the many challenges, was immediately restarted, initially with some 40,000 meals a day provided to schoolchildren. The programme continued to be scaled up as part of recovery efforts and now reached almost 1 million children. The programme targeted not only children, but also parents and communities. The speaker highlighted as key elements of a sustainable national school feeding programme the following needs: improving the legal framework, local procurement and national capacities; working through State institutions; flexible funding arrangements and timely disbursement of funds from donors; and good partners. Currently, about 250,000 people had benefited from the school feeding programme from the Haitian national budget. Together with assistance from WFP (800,000), the World Bank (50,000) and the United States Agency for International Development (45,000), the number of children fed by the programme had reached 1 million. The long-term objective was to reach all of the school-aged children in the country, who numbered approximately 2.2 million. The Government of Haiti was currently developing a national school feeding strategy and was requesting support from partners to expand the coverage and the quality of school feeding in the country, which included increasing the amount of food bought locally for the programme.

Kenya

8. The representative of Kenya said that the primary focus of Kenya's school feeding programme was to make sure that Kenyan children, especially those living in rural areas, were fed. There were different school feeding models supported by the Ministry of Education and WFP in Kenya depending on the food security contexts of the area. Additional objectives of the programme were improved potential for local purchase, increased attention to the education of girls and improved quality of education. Beneficiaries of school feeding in Kenya totalled more than 1.9 million children, most of whom were girls. The programme also supported local farmers by using home-grown food products. Since the onset of implementation, however, the programme had not been without cultural challenges, especially since girls were still kept at home and were forced to marry early. There was still progress to be made in changing that cultural behaviour. No child should go to school hungry. By working together, we could make a difference.

World Bank

9. The representative of the World Bank said that there was considerable demand for school feeding programmes, especially after the recent food and economic crises. School feeding functioned as a social safety net mechanism, e.g., through conditional cash transfers, which benefited the worst-off children. Nevertheless, school feeding was least commonly implemented where it was needed most, although many low-income countries were striving to develop such programmes. School feeding was initially perceived as an expensive intervention; however, that view had since changed. A joint study by WFP and the World Bank called "Rethinking school feeding" showed that school feeding was effective if well-targeted to the needy, with strong national ownership and the use of local production. Empirical evidence indicated that, when combined with local purchase, school feeding had the potential to have multiplier effects in terms of educational outcomes, gender equality outcomes and agricultural development. It could be nutritionally beneficial, especially when linked to other health interventions such as deworming. The use of school feeding programmes had also been shown to increase the ability of children to learn, so the benefits were long-term. Although school feeding programmes could indeed appear to be expensive, they could be managed properly in order to minimize costs and maximize benefits. The World Bank and WFP were currently working together in 10 countries to support national Governments in developing and implementing sustainable school feeding programmes.

World Food Programme

10. The representative of WFP said that school feeding had been proven to be a good investment, with multiple impacts and benefits related to better health, increased learning capacity and increased opportunities for children, especially for girls. WFP school feeding programmes had reached about 22 million children since they first started, and were now implemented in 68 countries. WFP had a new policy and approach to school feeding that supported home-grown and home-owned programmes, which had long-term sustainability. It was possible to overcome the major challenge of funding if multiple sources of funding were tapped from education, agriculture, health and social protection. WFP was optimistic, with the increasing prominence school feeding was gaining in different forums, including at

the recent Group of Twenty (G-20) and Group of Eight (G-8) summits and Education for All meetings, and the representative highlighted the need for continued advocacy for school feeding and its role in ending hunger and the attainment of education for all.

Egypt

11. The representative of Egypt said that the Egyptian school feeding programme had been ongoing since 1951. Twelve million girls had benefited from fortified date bars and take-home rations. Under the Girls' Education Initiative, the focus was on girls because of the critical importance of investing in girls in a society that traditionally had not done so in the past. Other programmes combated child labour by getting children off the streets. School feeding attracted the most vulnerable, and ensured that families would let children stay in school. The health and cognitive abilities of the children in those programmes had improved. School feeding programmes were implemented in partnership with 16 ministries in the country, with WFP joining in 2004.

Interventions

12. The Forum was well attended, with approximately 100 participants from the United Nations, permanent missions of Member States and civil society. Interventions were made from the floor by the following Member States: Tanzania (United Republic of), Nigeria, Armenia, Brazil, Haiti, Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia. Interventions were also made by international institutions (including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations-affiliated funds and programmes), non-governmental organizations (Haitian Diaspora and a non-governmental organization from India) and from the private sector. Those remarks are summarized below.

13. The representative of UNICEF noted the importance of not viewing school feeding as a stand-alone intervention, but rather as part of a holistic life cycle approach, complementary to early child development and a contribution to improved nutrition. UNICEF stressed that school feeding could help where attention was paid to the right quality of food, in terms of micronutrient foods, and improved maternal health through education, which helped benefit children.

14. The Secretary of State for Animal Production of Haiti touched on the importance of ensuring the local purchase of food in order to combat food insecurity and support agricultural development. School feeding was seen as a main pillar of the Haitian food security programme and the reconstruction plan.

15. The representative of Saudi Arabia underlined the need to share best practices associated with the funding and implementation of school feeding.

16. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania noted that school feeding was widely used in both developed and developing countries and should not be regarded as the exclusive purview of poor countries. He highlighted his Government's commitment to scale up its highly successful national school feeding programme and the importance of international assistance, including support from WFP.

17. Haitian Diaspora expressed support for WFP school feeding programmes in Haiti and called for international cooperation with the Government of Haiti to help

feed all children of Haiti through a national school feeding programme targeting all school-age children and purchasing food from local producers in order to foster local development. Haitian Diaspora also stressed the importance of school meals being nutritious but at the same time adapted to local food culture.

18. The representative of Nigeria raised the importance of addressing critical issues of sustainability and the costs encountered by Governments. She also spoke about the benefits derived from school feeding programmes.

19. A representative of a foundation working in India sought information on the scope for greater cooperation with partners and accountability measures for Governments implementing school feeding programming.

20. The representative of Armenia noted the unifying role of school feeding in the areas of development and education, and the useful experience of the Russian Federation in its cooperation with Armenia.

Closing remarks

21. The Chair noted that school feeding was a productive social protection instrument with multiple impacts that contributed to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 1 through 5.

22. She noted that school feeding programmes were a development "best buy" during a time of shrinking aid volumes when donors were looking for cost-effective interventions that crowded in a multiplicity of positive outcomes. For example, school feeding programmes were notable for their ability to feed hungry children, increase their cognitive ability to learn and heighten attendance (particularly by female students) while jump-starting rural development and increasing incomes for farmers (the majority of whom in Africa were women) through the use of local procurement modalities.

23. The Chair closed the meeting by emphasizing the importance of a sustained partnership, including South-South cooperation, to reinforce national efforts in the area of school feeding, and confirmed school feeding as a legitimate intervention that should be adequately reflected in the outcome document of the September 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals.